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BLIND EYES

True Stories of Blind People in Burma and Africa

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"BIG FATHER"

"THE ONE WHO TOUCHES"

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in
Burma and Africa

The Blind Piper

Junior Work Department,
S.P.G., 15 Tufton Street, Westminster, S.W. 1.

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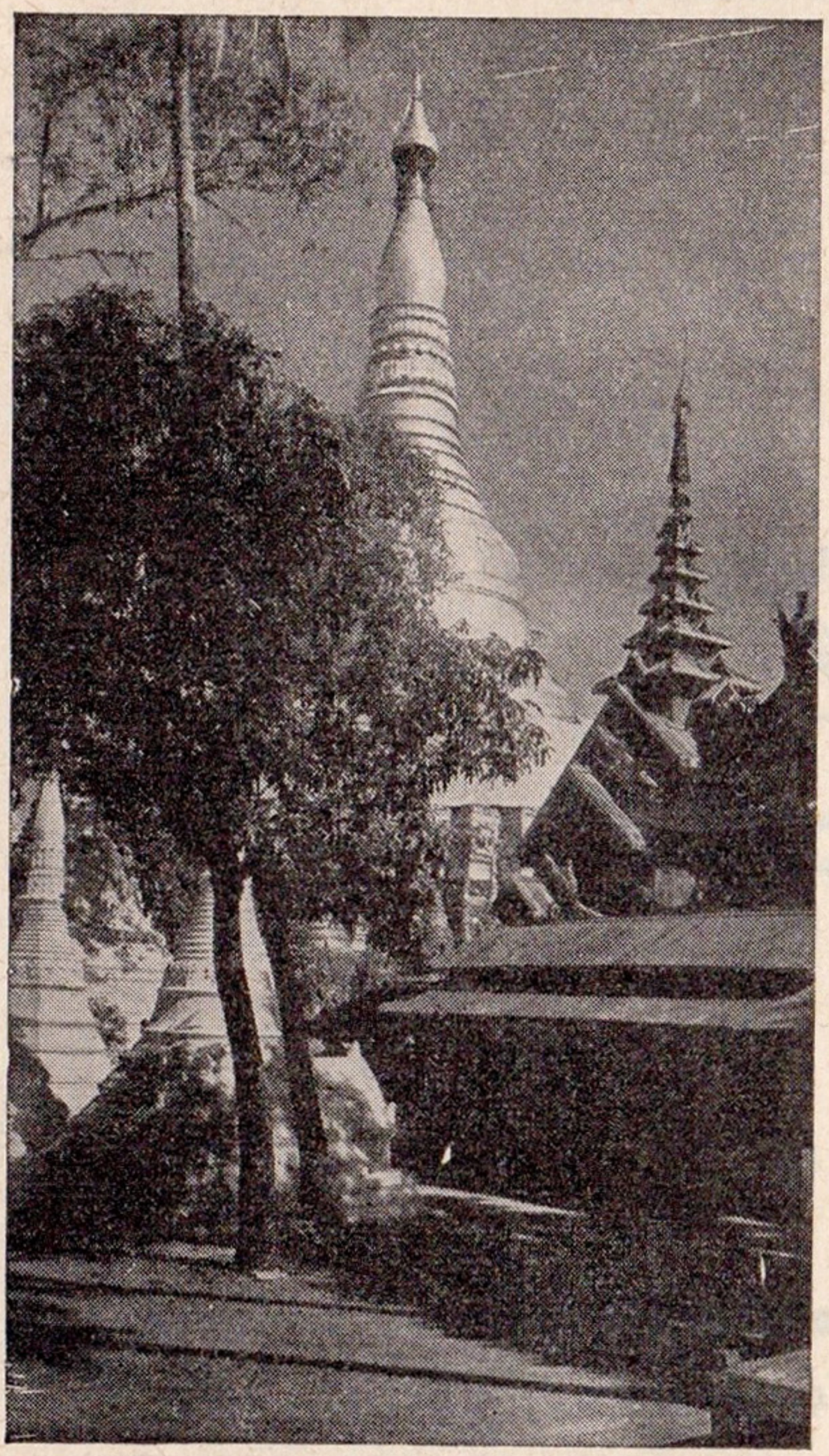
"BIG FATHER"

THIS is the story of William Henry Jackson, the blind missionary priest, who went to Burma to teach the blind. "Big Father," his Burmese friends called him. And they loved to see him walking down their streets, never swerving, steady and surefooted, almost as if he could see like other men. "Who would believe he had been blind ever since he was a toddler of three years old?" they asked.

You could not walk far through the lovely town of Kemmendine in Burma without noticing the number of blind beggars everywhere. Most of them sat near the Buddhist temples, and the pilgrims going in and out often threw them a coin. "*Ah-ma-lay*" (how pitiful) they said as they passed. Then they began to talk about the blind white man who had come to Kemmendine.



A Buddhist Temple.

"He has opened a school for blind boys," one man said, "and asked my neighbour to let his blind son go to it. Who ever heard of blind boys learning to read? It is probably some trick to get our children and murder them."

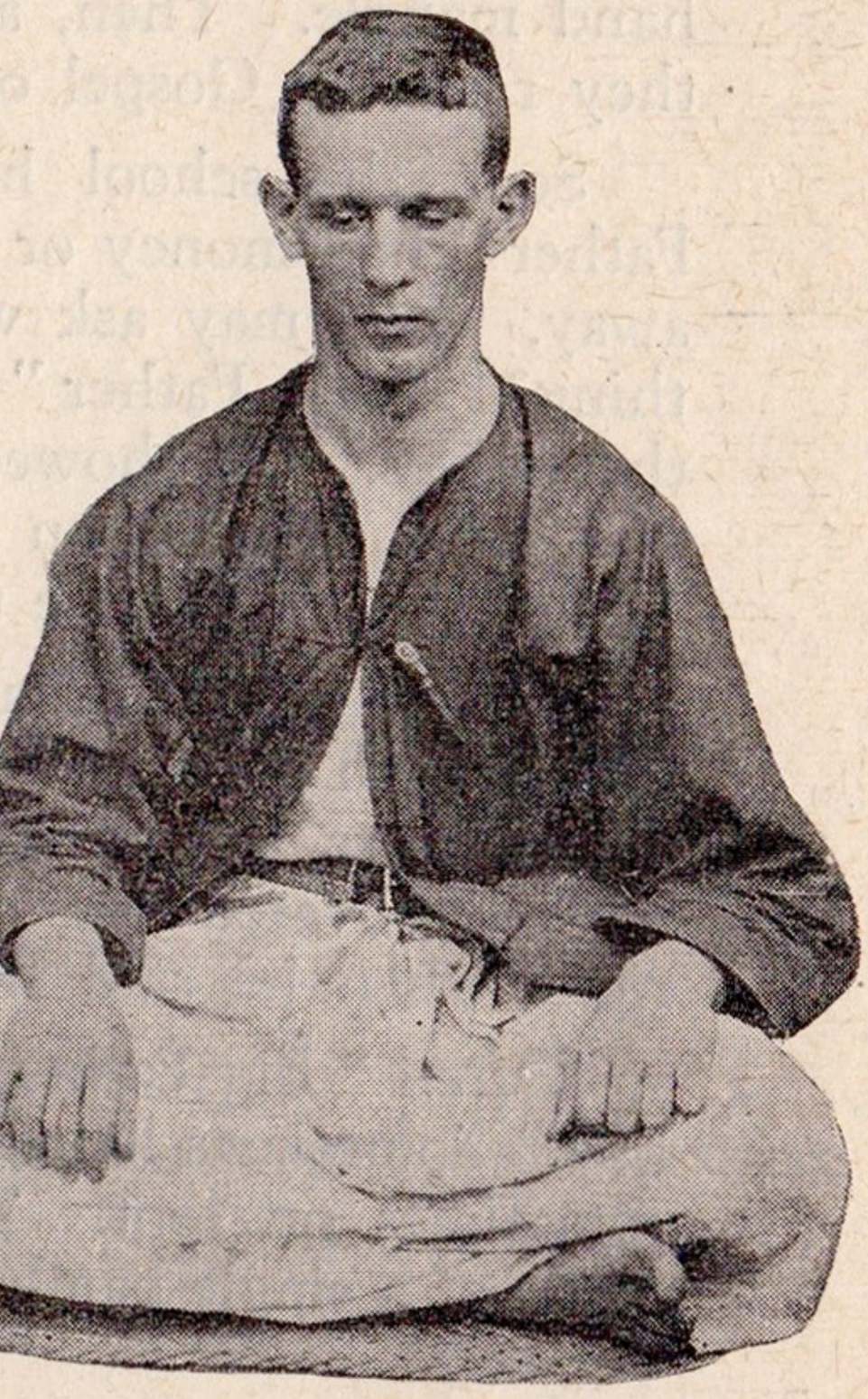
Meanwhile, William Jackson was learning Burmese as fast as he could. When he had been in Kemmendine a few months he went on a two hundred mile journey into the jungle. "I set off alone," he wrote, "under the guardianship of St. Michael and St. Gabriel; and it came out jolly well, too! My Burmese was just enough to carry me through, with one or two tight squeaks."

He brought back a blind boy from one of the villages, and soon he was joined by others. "*Apay-Gyi*" (Big Father), they cried; "you are the first friend we have ever known." And this was true, for William Jackson was the only person who did not say they must have been wicked because they were blind. For the Buddhist religion teaches that the misfortune of blindness is the result of someone's sin. "Big Father" told them that God loved them. "He has sent me," he said, "to teach you about Him and to make you His children."

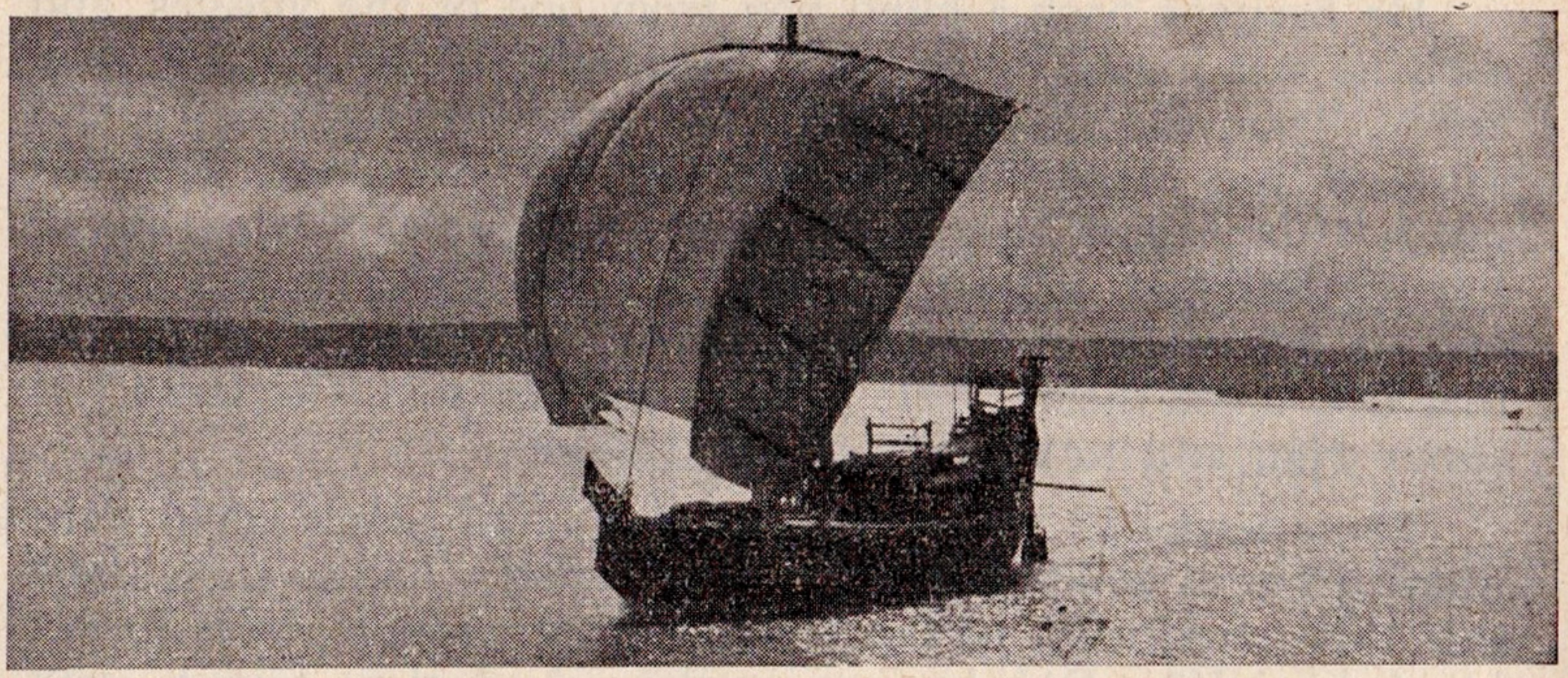
These boys had always believed that blind people could learn nothing but to whine and beg. "Big Father" had to show them that they could work perfectly well if they wished. Was he not blind himself? Did he not work? And they found, with wonder, that he could type and weave and make furniture just as if he could see like other men.

He took off the cassock, which he had worn in England, and put on a little jacket and a long draped skirt, such as Burmese men wear. He took off his boots and walked barefoot. He gave up his bed, and his tables and chairs, and his English food, and slept and sat on the floor. He learned to eat rice and fish with his fingers, as is the custom in Burma. At night he slept with his boys. By day he worked and played and had meals with them. And when they were ill he nursed them.

"Big Father" himself read Braille, and wrote on a special kind of typewriter made for blind people. But there was no Burmese Braille, and so he had to invent one before he could teach his boys to read and write. Even when he



'Big Father" in his Burmese dress.



had thought out a script, there was no machine to print the books, so "Big Father" invented that, too. He hammered the Braille signs in flattened-out kerosine tins, and rolled off paper copies by putting the tin sheets and the paper through a second-hand mangle. Then, at last, his blind boys could read. And they read the Gospel of Christ.

Soon the school had plenty of pupils, more than "Big Father" had money or room for; but he never turned one boy away. You may ask who found the money to pay for everything? "Big Father" taught his boys to earn some of it for themselves. He showed them how to make furniture and mats and rope. And soon the people of Kemmendine crowded to "Big Father's" house to buy what the boys had made.

"Have you heard about that school for blind boys?" people said to each other in Kemmendine. "We bought some splendid chairs there last week." Orders for work poured in, and the boys discovered for themselves that "Big Father" had been right when he said that blind people need not be beggars.

Often "Big Father" went on a long journey to fetch a new boy. Sometimes he travelled by boat, sometimes by bullock-cart, sometimes on foot. He crossed mountain torrents by bridges made of a single bamboo. Like many of God's heroes of old, he

walked safe in the midst of danger. And when he trod on a poisonous snake he was never bitten.

He went bareheaded and barefooted in burning sun and tropical rain. At night he slept in a palm-leaf hut, so tiny and so packed with people that he could not even lie full-length on the floor. But he was quite happy if he could bring another boy back to his school, a new blind soldier in the army of Christ. And when sickness came at last, William Jackson would not stay on leave in England, but he hastened back to Burma, the land of his love. And there, among the blind boys who called him their friend and their "Big Father," he entered upon his rest.

But "Big Father's" work still goes on in the schools which he founded, where men and women, English and Burmese, help blind boys and girls in the Name of the Lord Jesus.

"THE ONE WHO TOUCHES"

RADCLIFFE DHLAMLI is sixteen now and he has been blind, deaf and dumb ever since he was three years old. Read this story and you will see why his friends call Radcliffe "Mapupula"—the one who touches.

Radcliffe lost sight, hearing and speech through a bad illness. His mother was a servant, and she begged the white missus in whose house she worked to let her keep Radcliffe with her. So he stayed and she had him by her while she cooked and washed and cleaned. Radcliffe never learned to walk properly, and, of course, he couldn't hear or see or speak. His mother managed to teach him to dry the dishes that she washed, and to fold the clean clothes ready for her to iron. But she had very little time to spare from her work, and though she loved her son so dearly, she did not know how best to help him, and there was no one else in the world who would have anything to do with an African boy who could not work or learn as ordinary children can. At last, when Radcliffe was eleven years old, the white missus said he could not stop with his mother any longer.

His mother was in despair. If she could not work, there would be no food for either of them to eat. If she might not have Radcliffe with her, what would happen to a boy who could not hear what was said or see what was done or tell anyone what he needed? It seemed that there was no place where he could go. At last a magistrate, to

Radcliffe is blind, deaf and dumb.

whom his mother had gone for advice, heard of a school where two missionaries, Mr. and Mrs. Blaxall, trained blind African boys. He told them about Radcliffe and, though they had never had anything to do with a blind, deaf, dumb child, they agreed to take him and to teach him all that they could.

It was a great day for Radcliffe and his mother when they went to Ezenzeleni—the place where you work for yourself. They had never been parted before, but his mother left Radcliffe joyfully with the two people, who promised to care for him as a son.

If you could see Radcliffe coming out of the house, walking alone, to open the gate when he *feels* Mr. and Mrs. Blaxall's car come up the road, you would not recognize him as the same boy who went to Ezenzeleni only four years ago.

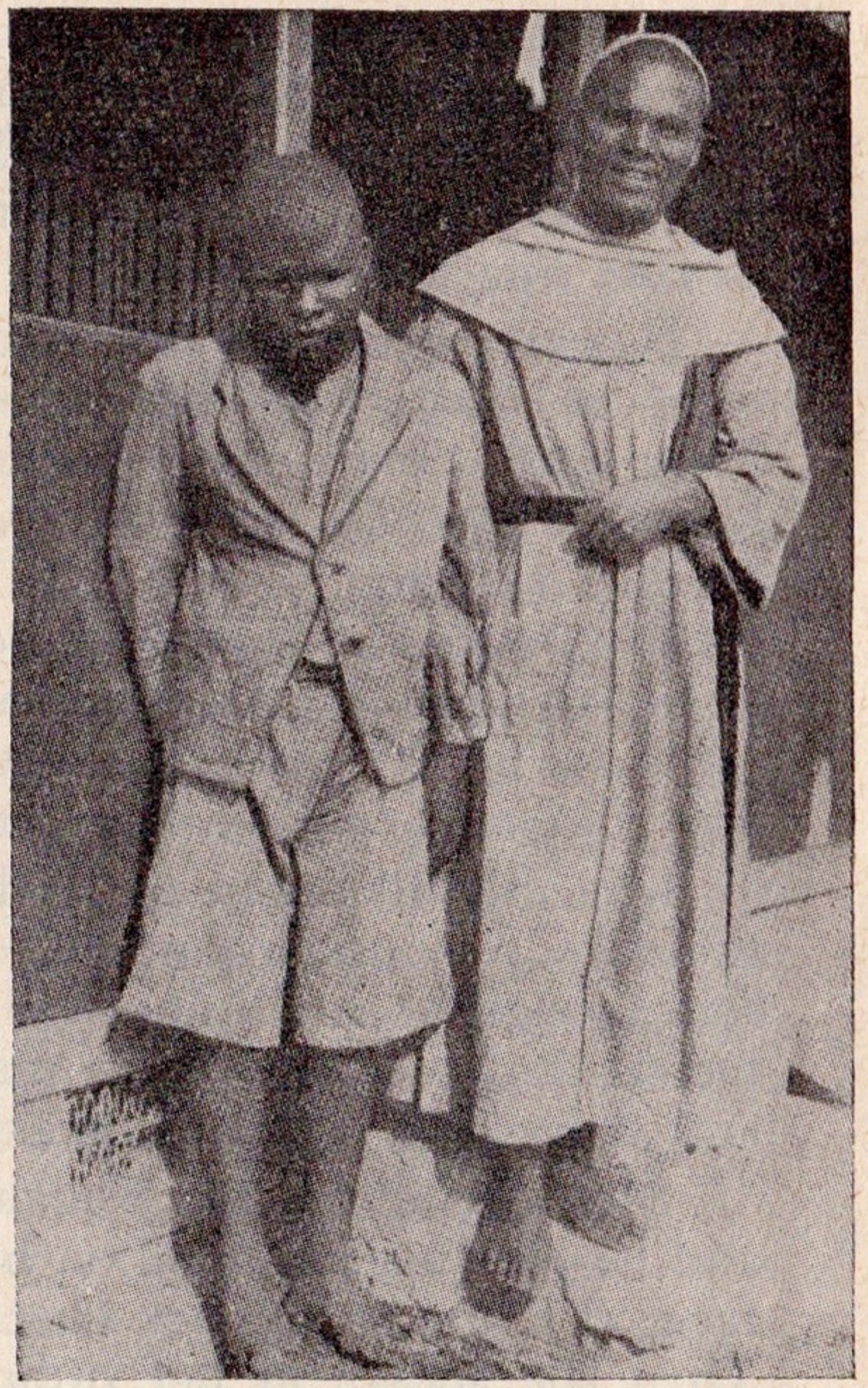
Mrs. Blaxall began to teach him at once. At first she tried to make him understand by touch. But then she found out that though he could not *hear* any sound, however loud or near his ear it was, yet with the rest of his body he could *feel* sound and movement which ordinary people would not notice at all.

Mrs. Blaxall teaches Radcliffe like this. She sits facing him and he puts his left hand on her knee and his right hand on her face, the fingers on her cheek and the thumb on her mouth. Then she speaks in her ordinary voice, and he *feels*, and has learnt to understand what she says. "Stand up," she says, and Radcliffe gets up. "Fold your arms." He does as she tells him. "Get up and walk round your chair." Radcliffe knows this is a joke and he smiles all over his face as he gets up and walks solemnly round. Sometimes, of course, he misunderstands. "Now think," Mrs. Blaxall tells him, and nearly always he does think and gets it right the second time.

After he had been with his teacher for some time Radcliffe learnt to make breathing sounds like the letters B, M, T and S, and by first feeling Mrs. Blaxall's face and lips and throat as she says the words, and then by feeling his own, he is able to form some words perfectly. The ones he knows best are arm, thumb, stick and comb. But so far he can only breathe, not speak, them.

He enjoys music, which he feels instead of hearing. He taps with joy when a tune is played on the piano and his taps are in perfect time with the music and change as it changes.

Radcliffe spends his day partly with Mrs. Blaxall and partly in the workshop and schoolroom where the blind boys are taught. In the picture you can see him making a wool rug. He likes doing that and also making baskets.



A new boy for the blind school.

His mother comes to see him whenever she can afford the time and money. Each time Radcliffe has some new thing to show her. He sits down beside her at once and puts all his treasures into her lap. You can imagine how delighted she is to see him well and happy and interested in all that he can feel around him. She joins with him in the prayer which he so often spells out, "Jesus, I thank thee."

Mr. and Mrs. Blaxall hope that when Radcliffe is older he may be trained as a teacher, for there are other African children blind and deaf as he is who have no one to help them. Will you pray that other people too may give their lives and their money to them in the Name of the Lord Jesus Who, when He was on earth, gave hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, and sight to the blind?

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H.B.S. & Co. Ltd. 1/47.